

SECRET

25X1A

May 21, 1951

**OIR/DRF Draft Contribution for NIE 35: Indochina: Current
Situation and Probable Developments**

State Dept. review completed

SECRET

Document No. _____
Review of this document by CIA has
determined that

☒ CIA has no objection to declass
☐ It contains information of CIA
interest that must remain
classified at YS S C
Authority: HR 70-2

☐ It contains nothing of CIA interest
Date 2-16-81 Reviewer 392644

QUESTIONS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM

- I. (Defense, G-2) WHAT IS THE CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION IN INDOCHINA?
- II. WHAT ARE THE VIET MINH'S PROSPECTS FOR SECURING INDOCHINA WITHOUT LARGE-SCALE INTERVENTION BY CHINESE COMMUNIST FORCES
- A. How much popular support does the Viet Minh enjoy? Is that support increasing? Is it likely to increase in the future?

Viet Minh control over the population and "popular support" for the Viet Minh in areas not under continuous surveillance of French-Vietnamese troops are attributable primarily to three factors: 1) the regime's consistent appeal to nationalist aspirations, intransigent opposition to the French, and development of its military strength; 2) a limited program of social reform and 3) a combination of propaganda, police-control and selective terrorism typical of a communist regime. Although the Viet Minh's appeal to nationalist aspirations was accountable for most of the Viet Minh's initial strength after the Japanese surrender and at the beginning of the period of open hostilities with the French, and although it continues to play an important role in perpetuating the Ho regime, totalitarian methods of control, are increasingly decisive today as instruments of control. Recent reorganization of the administrative structure of the Ho regime has placed the Communist Party in a strengthened position. It is therefore difficult to assess the extent to which current support for the Viet Minh is voluntary and the extent to which it is the result of mass social, political and economic compulsion.

Initial Viet Minh strength derived from the fact that it was the only well-organized political force in a position to seize governmental control after the Japanese surrender; it had as its leader Ho Chi Minh,

SECRET

SECRET

2

who was and is widely revered as a popular hero because of his past championship of Vietnamese nationalism, it presented a program with a broad popular appeal centered on the issue of independence; it welcomed the support of a number of diverse political parties; and it ostensibly stood for democratic forms of government in the Western sense.

From the time of the Japanese surrender until considerably after the outbreak of hostilities in December 1946 most Vietnamese were faced with a choice of supporting the Viet Minh or acquiescing to continued French rule. Communism during this period meant little to a majority of Vietnamese. Although it was widely known that Ho himself and a number of important leaders of the Viet Minh were Communists, even many of those few who were concerned lest this mean the emergence of a Communist state in Vietnam felt that the Communists could be dealt with once independence was secured. Such Communist doctrine as was propagated by the Viet Minh in the first few years of its existence was offered the Vietnamese as an interpretation of their experience in a local conflict, i.e. in terms of a struggle to evict the French from Indochina.

Taking advantage of the almost unanimous popular support it enjoyed, the Viet Minh from the outset perfected its administrative structure, primarily through the institution of a series of "resistance and administrative committees", at regional, provincial and local village levels. These committees exercise power over all phases of life, including military affairs, agricultural activities, social reforms, etc. They exist with varying degrees of effectiveness even in areas which are under French-Vietnamese military control.

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

3

The continued ability of the Viet Minh to prevent French forces during this period from extending their control beyond the major cities, isolated strong points and connecting lines of communication further increased its prestige. Certain social reforms, notably a mass literacy campaign and a promise of rent reduction also had a broad popular appeal.

The creation by the French of a Vietnamese Government under Bao Dai with a considerable degree of sovereignty, in opposition to the increasingly totalitarian Viet Minh regime, presented to the Vietnamese a choice hitherto lacking. The result was that a limited number of Vietnamese in areas under French-Vietnamese control actively supported Bao Dai and perhaps a larger number withdrew from politics and became known as "fence-sitters".

On balance there has probably been no increase in support for the Viet Minh, and perhaps a slight decrease, but, as a result of tightened controls, a possible increase in the effectiveness of its support in areas under its control. There is little likelihood that its support will increase in the future.

- B. To what extent is the Viet Minh's popular support translated into effective anti-French military, subversive or political activity? Can it be made more effective? Is it likely to be?

As long as French controls and French forces remain in Vietnam, the Viet Minh will be able to capitalize on the strong popular appeal of independence. This appeal by now has probably diminished and will continue to diminish in relation to the severity of Viet Minh controls and the extent to which a viable anti-Communist Vietnamese government can

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

4

be created and accepted by the Vietnamese people. However, intensive propaganda to the exclusion of news from non-Communist sources, combined with effective Communist control of all phases of activity, severely restricts the amount of free-will involved in the political decisions of Vietnamese under the Viet Minh.

The fact that there have been no significant defections from the Viet Minh to date, while at the same time, its armed forces have been steadily expanded, would seem to indicate a continued ability of the Viet Minh to wage war against the French-Vietnamese forces. Viet Minh ability to carry on warfare and engage large numbers of French troops has probably stimulated continued support for the Viet Minh, especially among those not directly subject to its increasingly severe methods of control. It has been estimated that large segments of the population of the larger cities are prepared to stage an organized uprising if called on to do so by the Viet Minh.

It is doubtful whether popular support for the Viet Minh can be substantially increased or decreased except as a direct concomitant of marked improvement or diminution of its military position.

C. To what extent, if any, is the Viet Minh strength increased by political conditions within Vietnam

As important as any other determinant maintaining popular support for the Viet Minh has been the slow progress towards creation of an effective non-Communist force that might appeal to the same nationalist sentiments on which the Viet Minh has thus far capitalized. Although negotiations for the return of Bao Dai began in 1947, he did not return

~~SECRET~~

until 1949, and some of the more important agreements regarding the transfer of authority from France to Vietnam were not signed until December 1950. Many of these agreements are still to be implemented, and their net result to date is to grant Vietnam something less than independence. Meanwhile, most Vietnamese fail to equate the limitations imposed on their sovereignty with those inherent in an orthodox Communist regime such as the Viet Minh and continue to regard the Viet Minh as an independent regime operated without outside influence.

It is unlikely that political conditions in Vietnam will cause any considerable increase in Viet Minh strength unless, as is deemed unlikely, the French intend to grant political concessions to the Vietnamese for tactical reasons only, with the ultimate purpose of recapturing effective control once they have achieved military victory over the Viet Minh. Should such an intention be exposed to the Vietnamese, much of whatever popular support the Bao Dai Government now enjoys would undoubtedly be forfeited. The present degree of Viet Minh strength is undoubtedly bolstered to the extent that most of the Vietnamese have thus far failed to give wholehearted support to Bao Dai and on the other hand have not declared themselves against the Viet Minh and, in fact, continue to give that regime moral, and certain economic support.

D. What is the significance of the recent political reorganization within the Viet Minh movement?

Coincident with the southward advance of the Chinese Communists, the Viet Minh initiated a series of measures which resulted in early 1951 in the emergence into the open of the Indochinese Communist Party under

the guise of the Vietnam Workers Party, and full acceptance of Communist national and international doctrine. During 1949 Communists assumed a more important role in the Ho regime; Pham Van Dong, for example, became vice-premier, and Tran Van Giau, Minister of Information. In December 1949 Vietnam (the Ho regime) was acknowledged as a "people's democracy" at the meeting of the Communist Women's International Democratic Federation in Pei-p'ing. The bond between the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" and the rest of the Communist world was tied more tightly in January 1950 with the recognition of the Ho regime by China and the USSR, and subsequently by the satellites.

Following the "official" acceptance of the Ho regime into the Communist bloc, Viet Minh propaganda has conformed more and more to the international Communist line, and, at the same time, measures have been consummated to effect changes in administrative structure in the mirror of the Communist prototype. Thus, two congresses were held in February and March 1951, the first to form the "Vietnam Workers Party," and the second to merge the Viet Minh (Vietnam Independence League) into the Lien Viet (National United Front). There had been previous indications that the Indochinese Communist Party, publicly dissolved in November 1945, would emerge into the open again; January 6, 1951, for example, had been celebrated as the anniversary of the party's founding. That the new Workers Party was in fact the Indochinese Communist Party was clearly indicated in its platform, its leadership, and commentaries which pointed to the Communist Party as its antecedent. (The Communist Party in most of the Eastern European satellites has at one time or another been known

as the "Workers Party," and the Communist Party in North Korea is known as the Korean Labor Party). Leader of the new party is the former president of the Association of Marxist Study Groups (cover for the Indochinese Communist Party after 1945), Truong Chinh (Dang Xuan Khu), who has been given considerable publicity on a scale previously reserved for Ho Chi Minh.

The Lien Viet, or National United Front, remains as a broad coalition embracing all supporters of the Ho regime who are not necessarily members of the Workers Party. The relationship between the Workers Party and the Lien Viet is indicated in the following two broadcasts. On March 1, 1951 the Moscow radio declared in reference to Vietnam, "The experience of the struggle in Eastern European countries has shown that the liberation movement results in victory only when the mass national front is headed by the working class, guided by the party of the proletariat armed with the Marxist-Leninist theory." The platform of the Vietnam Workers Party as announced by the Ho radio on March 13, 1951 stated, "The people's rule relies on the National United Front on the basis of the alliance between the workers, peasants, and intellectual workers under the leadership of the working class."

Why the above changes were made when they were is not altogether clear, though they are developments to be expected in the growth of any Communist regime. What they imply is a further strengthening of Communist controls. To date, the leadership of the Workers Party in respect to peasant organizations, labor and the armed forces has been publicized by the Ho radio. In the past the Viet Minh is known to have

engaged in terrorism and various forms of intimidation to assure control of the population. Whereas these controls were previously exercised indirectly by Communists through positions of strength in the "government" and armed forces, it is to be expected that they will now be imposed directly by the Workers Party.

E. Can the Viet Minh develop sufficient military forces to secure control of Indochina without large-scale Chinese Communist intervention?

The Viet Minh appears to continue to maintain control over a sufficiently large population to provide the manpower for an army, which, if well-equipped with modern weapons, might secure control of Indochina. It is doubtful whether it has under its control the economic resources necessary to support such an army; it certainly does not presently have the facilities in terms of equipment and training facilities to expand greatly the present size of its armed forces. Although this is essentially a military question, it would seem that as a result of large-scale American military aid and French reinforcements the Viet Minh certainly could not develop sufficient strength to secure control of Indochina without large-scale Chinese Communist intervention, at least as long as the present French-Vietnamese military effort is sustained.

III. ASSUMING NO DIRECT CHINESE COMMUNIST INTERVENTION, WHAT ARE FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE PROSPECTS FOR ULTIMATE SUCCESS AGAINST THE VIET MINH?

A. (Defense, G-2)

B. What progress has been made in building up popular support for the Vietnamese regime?

Little progress has been made in building up popular support for the Vietnamese Government. Despite such positive steps as the conclusion

SECRET

of the final agreements called for in the March 8 Agreement between Bao Dai and President Auriol, the turnover of certain functions under these agreements, international recognition of Vietnam by the United States, Great Britain and some thirty-odd states, a commitment to create rapidly a national army, a program of US military and economic aid, and promises of social, economic and political reform by Bao Dai, the Government has not been able to attract significant support from the Viet Minh or from among the "fence-sitters." The present Government under Prime Minister Huu, although first heralded as a government of "national union" is unrepresentative in character, and composed for the most part of factional supporters of Huu.

The reasons for the failure of the Vietnamese Government to attract further support can be found in the intense nationalism that foredooms any administration in Vietnam that cooperates closely with the French; the feeling of many Vietnamese, including influential "fence-sitters" that concessions to independence thus far granted by France fall short of independence on the model of Indonesia, Burma or the British dominions; ill-feeling generated by the presence of the French troops which are necessary to preserve the very existence of the Associated State of Vietnam; failure of the major political leaders who do support Bao Dai to agree among themselves; indecision as to the ultimate outcome of the struggle in Vietnam, with consequent unwillingness to choose sides; severe Viet Minh controls which prevent significant defections from that regime; and slowness in creating a national army and in implementing promised reforms.

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

9

Steps have been initiated to overcome certain of these obstacles. Notably Bao Dai has expressed his conviction that the French are sincerely committed to forming a national army, and Bao Dai and Prime Minister Huu are both vying to stimulate creation of some form of representative assembly. However, a spirit of widespread popular confidence in the Government and in French intentions to relinquish controls has yet to be generated.

C. What is the present relationship between the French and the Vietnamese regime, and how does this relationship affect collaboration against the Viet Minh?

Relations between the government of Vietnam and the French are probably better now than at any time since the return of Bao Dai. This is due in large part to the complete confidence Prime Minister Huu has expressed in General de Lattre's military and civilian leadership. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's position has been secured at the price of installing factional supporters in almost all positions of authority in both North and South Vietnam (Central Vietnam remains the preserve of Governor Giau). The support of the Dai Viet, powerful nationalist group, in North Vietnam, was lost to the government during the latest cabinet reorganization. While the Prime Minister's recent unequivocal statements calling for close collaboration with the French and all-out war against the Viet Minh have evoked a most favorable response in France, they have been received with relative apathy in Vietnam, where Huu is popularly regarded as too closely identified with the French.

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

Bao Dai's own strategy appears to be to remain somewhat aloof; at one moment he expresses complete satisfaction with French intentions, at another he complains of the High Commissioner's colonialist-minded advisors.

If a national army can be quickly organized on an effective scale and the reality of Vietnamese internal and external sovereignty effectively demonstrated (e.g. turnover of "pacified" areas to Vietnamese control) there may be hope for greater popular support in the fight against the Viet Minh; for the time being, there is close collaboration between the government proper and the French, but apathy among the general populace in areas under French-Vietnamese control.

IV. (Defense, G-2) WHAT ARE THE CHINESE COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES TO INTERVENE EFFECTIVELY IN INDOCHINA?

V. WHAT ARE THE APPARENT CHINESE COMMUNIST INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO INDOCHINA?

A. Sino-Soviet Strategy in the Far East

There has been no indication thus far that Soviet and Chinese Communist strategy calls for an early consolidation of Communist control over Indochina. In this connection, the following considerations seems pertinent:

(1) The Chinese Communist and Soviet leaders view the attempts of each Communist Party in East Asia to attain national power as part of the broader struggle between Communist and anti-Communist forces throughout the world, whose course and intensity they feel they can and should influence. Their general aim in participating positively in this world-wide conflict is to deprive their principal antagonist, the US, of influence

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

11

and bases, while at the same time protecting and strengthening the main sources of their own national and international power. Whether or not Moscow and Peiping choose to contribute materially to the operations of any one national Communist Party will depend, though, on their existing capabilities, the risks involved, and the advantages to be gained.

(2) Korea is at the moment the place where the primary conflict is being waged most intensively and where Communist China and the USSR are directly and indirectly involved in military operations which may have no decisive outcome for some time. Peiping and Moscow are therefore constrained to view their possible courses of action in Indochina in the light of their strategic interests involved in the Korean war as well as the advantages and risks that would accrue from their taking the action necessary to insure an early consolidation of Communist control over Indochina.

(3) Although their strategic interests in Korea may differ somewhat, the USSR and Communist China will both regard these interests as having greater importance than their interests in Indochina. The conflict in Korea currently involves a struggle between US-UN and Chinese and Korean troops near the very borders of the USSR. Moreover, Korea's possession in Communist hands would pose an immediate threat to Japan, whose capacity for playing a key role in anti-Communist activities in the Far East is still recognized by Moscow and Peiping. The primary importance of Indochina in Sino-Soviet calculations lies in (a) that country's position as an access to Southeast Asia, (b) the opportunity thus afforded to deprive the Western states of existing or potential bases,

SECRET

and (e) the opportunity to divert further US and Western strength from other critical areas.

(4) The risks to Communist China and the USSR, growing out of the measures they would have to take to realize the strategic advantages afforded by early Communist control over Indochina, are thought, moreover, to outweigh these advantages. The two Communist countries would definitely risk extending the area of their direct conflict with the world anti-Communist forces. Even if the extended area of direct conflict remained restricted to Korea and Indochina, Communist China and the Soviet Union would greatly increase the danger of air and land attacks upon Chinese territory and the solidification of public opinion in Europe and Asia against the Communist movement. It is not likely that Moscow and Peiping are now ready to risk these setbacks to the world Communist movement and to the primary sources of their own strength.

The following considerations would tend to make the Soviet and Chinese Communist leaders disposed to accept a continuation of the present situation.

(1) Moscow and Peiping may well be satisfied with the current indecisive involvement of Western forces in the Far East.

(2) The Soviet and Chinese Communist policy-makers undoubtedly calculate that China's emergence as a militant power still affords opportunities for exerting pressure on the non-Communist governments of Asia without the necessity for direct Chinese Communist military action.

(3) The two Communist states apparently see further opportunities to exploit the nationalist feelings, unsettled political conditions, and economic difficulties in Southeast Asia in their campaign to increase

SECRET

13

anti-US sentiment and weaken the existing governments in the region. In this connection, Soviet and Chinese Communist statements have stressed that "armed struggle" on the Chinese model will ultimately lead the various national Communist Parties in Southeast Asia to victory.

B. Limitations on Chinese Communist Capabilities

The Korean war and developments within Communist China appear to have placed certain limitations on Chinese Communist capabilities for military intervention in Indochina.

The Korean war's effects on Chinese Communist intentions toward Indochina are still not entirely clear. While it cannot be shown that the Korean war caused Pei-p'ing to abandon plans it might have had to invade Indochina, it can be said with some assurance that its military commitments in Korea have not affected significantly its intention to maintain the constant threat of a military invasion over the French command in Indochina. There are indications, on the other hand, that the supply of Chinese Communist military aid to the forces of the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" has been reduced sporadically because of the prior claims of the Chinese Communist troops in Korea.

Within Communist China, the human and material resources of the country have been largely mobilized in support of the Korean fighting. Military supplies nevertheless apparently continue to reach depots in southwest China, and public works in this region having a military character are still being constructed. The persistence of armed anti-government activity in the provinces close to Indochina, especially Kwangsi and Kwangtung, has also detracted from the readiness for regular

SECRET

SECRET

11

field operations of perhaps half of the Chinese Communist troops poised on the southern border.

C. Chinese Communist-Viet Minh Relations

Relations between the Chinese Communist regime and the Ho Chi Minh regime have been most friendly. Communist China was the first country with which the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" exchanged recognition in January 1950; an ambassador of the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" recently presented his credentials in Pei-p'ing where he was warmly received (no Chinese Communist envoy to the Ho regime has yet been reported). There are constant reports of a Chinese Communist-Viet Minh treaty, aid agreements (including provision for Viet Minh payments), and a Sino-Vietnamese agency established to administer Chinese Communist military aid. Within Vietnam there has been a concerted propaganda campaign to overcome the traditional antipathy of Vietnamese toward the Chinese. "Sino-Vietnamese Friendship Associations" have been formed in every community, and the considerate treatment of Chinese in Viet Minh areas is contrasted to purported maltreatment and atrocities in French-Vietnamese areas. In Viet Minh propaganda Communist China is accorded a special position together with the USSR, and both regimes respectfully refer to the seniority of Communist China as the formulator of the "correct" Communist strategy, and to the fact that Viet Minh success has been insured by "the victory of the Chinese people."

SECRET

D. Probable Chinese Communist Intentions and Actions Respecting Indochina

Chinese Communists have taken no pains to hide their desire that the French-led forces in Indochina be defeated by force of arms. The Chinese Communists appear confident that the Vietnamese Communists have the capacity for self-generated growth and might eventually eliminate, unaided, French authority from Indochina, but they probably desire nevertheless to accelerate that process to the extent allowed by their resources and other foreign commitments. To this end, they apparently intend for the immediate future merely to continue (1) providing military training and aid as available to the Vietnamese Communist armies, and (2) placing the French-led forces under the threat of a large-scale invasion beyond their power to withstand. This would enable the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" to plan its activities with the hope that it could ultimately call upon a much greater military strength than its own for its defense. That the Chinese Communists do not at present plan increased covert assistance or direct intervention is indirectly indicated by recent Viet Minh pronouncements stressing a return to guerrilla warfare and reliance on their own strength.

In the event the French-led forces launched an effective counteroffensive in Indochina, or if the US economic and military aid to the French and the Bao Dai government were increased, or again if the Bao Dai government gained strength, the Pei-p'ing government would have to review its program of action regarding Indochina, but would probably do no more than strive to increase its covert military aid to the Vietnamese Communists.

SECRET

16

These Chinese Communist intentions are only partially revealed in Pei-p'ing's propaganda. The threat posed for the Chinese "people" by French border violations, the persecution of the Chinese minority in Indochina, and by the domination exercised over the French by China's main enemy, the US, is continually brought home. The "mounting victories" of the Vietnamese "people" and the "correctness" of the Vietnamese Communist leadership are also stressed. No mention is made of Chinese Communist aid to the Vietnamese Communists, other than reference to the ideological inspiration afforded by Mao's writings and to the added strength lent the Vietnamese Communist armies by the close presence of masses of friendly Chinese Communist troops.

SECRET